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# Urban Scrawl: Satire as Subversion in Banksy's Graphic Discourse

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URBAN SCRAWL: SATIRE AS SUBVERSION  
IN BANKSY'S GRAPHIC DISCOURSE

by

Joshua Carlisle Harzman

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URBAN SCRAWL: SATIRE AS SUBVERSION  
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by

Joshua Carlisle Harzman

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Connie Lynn and Bradley Earl Harzman, for their unyielding love and tenacious support of my scholarship.

Also, my Grandpa, Don.

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## Urban Scrawl: Satire as Subversion in Banksy's Graphic Discourse

### Abstract

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University of the Pacific  
2018

This thesis analyzes the ways in which Banksy's street art installations are used to critique sociopolitical injustices. The street has long existed as a platform for social and political movements. In particular, street art offers unique opportunities for voicing criticisms in pioneering ways that have been proven successful in upsetting normative power structures. Anne Theresa Demo's analysis on the Guerilla Girls' comic politics of subversion offers an appropriate conceptual lens to analyze Banksy's employment of perspectives by incongruity as strategies for subversion. Therefore, this thesis analyzes how Banksy's subversive satire is rhetorical by examining three techniques that have successfully exposed hegemonic institutions: mimicry, revision, and juxtaposition. Further, I argue that Banksy's street art gallery, *Better Out Than In*, utilized these techniques in a global, revolutionary manner to bolster access and widen audience participation. Banksy's street art both spotlights contemporary injustices and provides a frame to interpret the artist's critical perspectives. By analyzing the ways in which Banksy uses satire as subversion, this thesis illustrates how visual rhetoric can offer liberation for victims of sociopolitical injustice.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: The Banksy Effect.....	9
Chapter I: Review of Literature .....	16
Unpacking Satire.....	17
Visual Rhetoric and Street Art.....	21
Satire as Subversion.....	26
Banksy.....	29
Chapter II: Methodology (Comic Politics of Subversion).....	33
Interlude: Artifacts from <i>Better Out Than In</i> .....	37
<i>Rebel Rocket Attack</i> .....	37
<i>Crazy Horses Riding Through the Lower East Side to a WikiLeaks Soundtrack</i> .....	38
<i>Shoe Shine</i> .....	39
Chapter III: Analysis.....	40
<i>Rebel Rocket Attack</i> .....	40
<i>Crazy Horses</i> .....	47
<i>Shoe Shine</i> .....	55
Conclusion: Disturbing the Piece.....	61
References.....	65
Notes.....	75



*“For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.” –Audre Lorde*

### **Introduction: The Banksy Effect**

People across the American countryside are disturbed with sociopolitical injustices. These include the steady growth of wealth inequality, the military-industrial complex, haunting racial discrimination, both domestic and international terrorism, corporate labor abuse, and a multitude more sociopolitical injustices. Some of these evils have a long history, and yet others are more recent developments of the twenty-first century. Each of these inequalities sparks public criticism that can take a variety of forms. The public sphere is clouded with hegemonic narratives encouraging us to imbibe ideologies that conceal these injustices: that labor abuses are not extensive, that evils of terrorism are being championed, and that our militaries operate in the best interest of the public. The problem lies in the representation of these injustices. Public protests, debates, concerts, social media campaigns, and countless other means are employed in order to communicate opposition to social and political inequity.

Artists, in particular, utilize nontraditional methods to combat sociopolitical injustices that pervade contemporary civilization. Satire, loosely defined as the intersection of humor and politics, is a particularly effective method at publically airing grievances. For example, the Guerilla Girls are artists that employ satirical techniques, such as irony and metaphor, to communicate messages that juxtapose humor and politics in order to create new ways of understanding amongst audiences. By manipulating iconic art, the Girls interrogate pervasive sexual inequality amongst artistic representation. Similarly, one predominantly popular satirical critic is the street artist Banksy. Banksy has become increasingly prevalent as the artist who uses satirical street art to voice critiques of social and political injustices through the intersection of humor and politics.

Banksy's popularity is truly remarkable. Banksy is considered both "an elusive street artist punk and an art-world darling," who is credited for an evolution of graffiti art; original Banksy's have sold for upwards of \$1.8 million (Kennedy, 2014). In fact, Banksy is credited with inspiring a wave of popularity amongst street art. Journalist Max Foster coined the phrase "the Banksy Effect," to illustrate how popularity in street art dramatically rose out of Banksy's popularity (*Your World Today*, 2006). To be clear, Banksy does not deserve sole credit for the popular rise in street art. "But without Banksy it is impossible to imagine that graffiti art, or as it is now more often called 'urban art', street art' or, more ridiculously, 'outsider art', would occupy the place it does today" (Ellsworth-Jones, 2013). Banksy's fame has provided a significant contribution to the popular rise in graffiti and street art.

Yet, Banksy is a pseudonym. No one knows the real identity of the artist(s). The name Banksy is a *nom de guerre* and a large part of their<sup>i</sup> fame comes from this continued anonymity. Further, secrecy remains an important quality of Banksy's identity due to the illegal nature of their unsolicited street art. Perhaps even more important, remaining anonymous keeps attention focused on issues rather than the individual (Demo, 2000). In fact, some argue that the alias amplifies Banksy's acclaim. "An anonymous bad artist will remain just that and no one will have any interest in who he might be; but combining Banksy's talent with anonymity produced a remarkable effect" (Ellsworth-Jones, 2002). Amidst global fame, artists and scientists alike are set on revealing the identity of Banksy. For example, geographic profiling – a practice used for tracking serial killers, infectious disease, and terrorist activity – has been employed to try and unmask the famed artist (Hauge et. al, 2016; *Economist*, 2016). In order to maintain

this spectacular balance between international prestige and anonymity, Banksy has engineered a publicity machine. “Authentication of Banksy’s work is strictly controlled by an entity called Pest Control, which certifies bona fide pieces that the artist, who remains anonymous, intended to sell. Pest Control does not authenticate Banksy’s street work, saying he wishes it to remain public; a policy that also serves to sidestep admission of vandalism (Buckley and Goodman, 2013). Anonymity provides a cover for both the art and the artist.

Banksy’s popularity makes them even more unique, because audiences do not have to see the graffiti live. Banksy is so popular that their art gets photographed, printed, and distributed worldwide. While maintaining anonymity, Banksy has released several self-published books including *Banging Your Head Against a Brick Wall* (2001), *Existentialism* (2002), *Cut It Out* (2004), *Wall and Piece* (2005), *Pictures of Walls* (2005), and *You Are An Acceptable Level of Threat* (2012). The artist has also directed two documentaries entitled *Exit Through the Gift Shop* (2010) and *The Antics Roadshow* (2011). Banksy has hosted a variety of art exhibitions including *Barely Legal* (2007) and *Banksy vs. the Bristol Museum* (2009). Additionally, Banksy travels the globe to install their art in very unexpected locations. “He can thus be spraying walls in Israel, Hollywood, Barcelona or London and everyone can see what he has done – it gives his art a lifespan that graffiti artists never had before. The wall might be painted over but the picture is still there” (Ellsworth-Jones, 2013). Even more recently, Banksy employed unforeseen techniques to host a street art exhibition entirely outdoors.

In October 2013, Banksy visited New York City and hosted an entire thirty-one day exhibition on the city streets entitled *Better Out Than In*. The title itself is a British

colloquialism similar to the American expression, “Bless You” (Donayre and Sen, 2013). In this context, however, the title alludes to a free public exhibition hosted entirely on the streets of New York City. Banksy is known to travel the globe for their creative street art. Still, the 2013 NYC show was a unique endeavor because it lasted an entire month. “The plan is to live here, react to things, see the sights - and paint on them,” as Banksy told the *Village Voice* in an email. “Some of it will be pretty elaborate, and some will just be a scrawl on a toilet wall” (Evans, 2013). The city itself provided an important cultural component of the artist’s exhibition. “New York calls to graffiti writers like a dirty old lighthouse. We all want to prove ourselves here” (Zeveloff, 2013). The month long series, *Better Out Than In*, premiered a new piece of street art daily and audiences were given clues to the installment locations via Banksy’s online presence. For example, the artist created an Instagram account called Banksynny, which had at least 26,000 followers (Vincent, et. al. 2015). The unorthodox method of hosting a month long street art series surprised many of the city’s residents; documentary filmmaker Chris Moukarbel elaborates:

“No one really knew what Banksy was doing. No one had put a frame around it,” says Chris as he describes the process of allowing the stories to tell him and producer Jack Turner what actually happened. “I mean he so expertly used social media,” says Turner, “Having an Instagram account from the first day -- he invented a way for communicating his work and created a following for it and created an event that is a work itself” (Rojo and Harrington, 2014).

Not only did this bring new legal questions to the foreground of public street art, as some of Banksy’s performance artists were arrested, but Banksy’s pieces also seemed to critique aspects of the American ideological landscape in new and exciting ways. Banksy traveled to all five boroughs of New York City to install street art installations. “Each

piece was revealed online, sending giddy crowds on a hunt to find it, before it was stolen, tagged, removed or defaced” (Buckley and Goodman, 2013). The show was nothing short of revolutionary.

New York City has a rich history with street art. As it boasts the largest population in the United States, artists across the world have sought out the cityscape as the ideal canvas for their progressive, communicative installations. In choosing the iconic city for this exhibition, Banksy targeted popularly controversial topics of American sociopolitical injustices as inspiration for their thirty-one street art installations. Citizens were encouraged to explore public spaces that they would not have otherwise visited. Cara Buckley (2013) of the *New York Times* explains:

Nearly every day, as part of what he called his New York “residency,” Banksy has posted to his website and Instagram a photo of a new piece — a wry scrawl, a cheeky silhouette, a cartoony sculpture, an installation — and identified its location by neighborhood. He has wended through all five boroughs with the project, titled “Better Out Than In” — although Staten Island got only one Banksy, and it was a video. As soon as a post goes up, little armies of people set out to find it — Banksy’s work sells for hundreds of thousands of dollars, and here it was hanging free — twittering in triumph when they do. Borough by borough, and sometimes neighborhood by neighborhood, reactions differed every time a Banksy popped up. In a way, it took this Englishman to remind New Yorkers that parts of our city remain distinct as foreign lands (Buckley, 2013).

New Yorkers traveled far and wide in order to search nooks and crannies of the city that would have otherwise remained unvisited. *Better Out Than In* inspired both citizens and visitors alike to explore the city’s range of communities from Manhattan to the Bronx. As audiences clamored to view the latest installation from Banksy, they expanded their conceptions of comfortable public space. Banksy’s show inspired people to search these places, but also, many of the pieces interrogated topics that impacted that very site including environmental preservation, factory farming, and gentrification.

Not only is Banksy's audience vast, so, too, is the subject matter of their street art. Perhaps three of the most controversial, vivid, and intensively innovative installations involved subject matter that was contemporarily relevant to the American public – terrorism, the Iraq War, and corporate wage slavery. Whether covered throughout American media outlets, classroom discussions, or in coffee shops across the country – these three topics struck at the heart of American political discourse. One piece was a film that depicted terrorists shooting down the Disney character, Dumbo, with a rocket launcher. The film mimicked real footage and gave the illusion of a legitimate journalistic publication. Another piece offered a graffiti mural that reimagined a Baghdad air strike from the Iraq War. Described as Banksy's most somber art ever, the spray painted illustration showed three horses wearing night vision goggles charging over slain victims. Lastly, Banksy created a giant Ronald McDonald look-alike statue and paired it with a street performance. Audiences watched as a shoeless man shined the exaggeratedly large, red shoes of the towering corporate clown. Each of these street art installations involved subject matter that remained relevant to the American public. Banksy's innovative techniques brought these transnational issues directly into people's neighborhoods, which encouraged both exploration of and further communication about these incredibly relevant sociopolitical injustices.

This study is relevant and timely because Banksy's messages are grounded in themes that reflect knowledge of the contemporary public sphere. Terrorism, war crimes, and corporate labor abuses are recurring themes in the daily news broadcasts. In terms of form, Banksy utilizes themes of victimization, featuring protagonists that embody innocence throughout their work. For example, many of Banksy's installations feature a

child or youthful figure. Most audiences can identify with these themes because everyone can relate to the concepts of innocence and humor. As children can be used to

These works snare audience's attention and offer a reimagining of the function and purpose of satire. This thesis analyzes Banksy's street art in order to better delineate Banksy's ideology and the ways in which their art offers liberatory solutions to sociopolitical injustices. Specifically, by investigating three techniques in their art that have successfully exposed hegemonic institutions: mimicry, revision, and juxtaposition. Banksy creates unique, satirical installations in order to critique injustices throughout the world. Their street art both spotlights contemporary injustices and provides a frame to interpret the artist's critical perspectives. Banksy's prestige is expansive. Therefore, it is imperative that these exciting and innovative communication artifacts are put under an academic microscope. As Banksy's rise to international fame continues, it remains pertinent that contemporary scholars seek to analyze the implications of such renowned works.



## Chapter I: Review of Literature

This literature review discusses how rhetorical humor can be employed to expose the hegemony of institutions that capitalize on sociopolitical injustice. When people can critique the power of modern metanarratives, they can more readily determine if they value the existence of such power structures. For example, the Guerilla Girls successfully used political comedy to highlight both the subjective and objective inequality between the sexes in artistic representation (Demo, 2000). Therefore, political comedy can be an important tool in defining the hegemony of institutions. It is important to note that some scholars worry satire reinforces the very ideologies it is used to disrupt.<sup>ii</sup> As a result, this thesis further closes the gap in literature regarding the efficacy of satire as a visual rhetorical technique for liberation from sociopolitical injustice. While satire functions at the intersection of humor and politics, visual rhetoric seeks to understand the ideologies communicated through ocular representation. However, both satire and visual rhetoric are incredibly complex and expansive fields of communication scholarship. Further, their application to media such as graffiti and street art is a relatively inchoate practice. In order to analyze how Banksy's street art uses satire as a strategy of subversion for sociopolitical justice, this literature review offers a historical grounding of theories related to satire, visual rhetoric, graffiti, and street art.

## Unpacking Satire

Humor is an important communication tool that humans use to help determine who they are and what they value. Comedy has long served as an important sociological tool for understanding a culture because people use comicality to enforce inclusion and exclusion of acceptable behaviors. John C. Meyer (2000) notes that the use of humor creates four rhetorical functions, operating on a continuum, that tend to either unite or divide communicators. The first two functions, identification and clarification, are used to propagate agreement and serve to unify communicators; while the second two functions, enforcement and differentiation, highlight disagreement with an issue and serve to divide communicators. However, the rhetorical capabilities of humor become more entangled when messages unite one group against another. Rhetorical humor that emphasizes unification can simultaneously divide communicators, and vice versa. Rhetors can use humor to represent concepts in innovative and unexpected ways that reflect attitudes toward those concepts – those attitudes are then proliferated throughout society. Attitudes that are alike, then, work to form systems of meaning that people use to assess their social and political roles (Gring-Pemle and Watson, 2003). In short, humans use jokes to enforce the parameters of their communities. When a person finds something humorous, its funniness is indicative of an inconsistency within the social strata. Further, artifacts and phenomena that inspire laughter are not inherently amusing. The creation and comprehension of comicalness necessitates prior knowledge of one's tribe and the pertinent symbolism used for communication amongst its members. If we can understand why a group finds something humorous, we can begin to understand the ideologies, or rather, the prevailing normative thought of that culture.

Although it has existed for some time, finding a cohesive definition of satire proves challenging. Whereas comedy is employed for the intent of entertainment, satire offers a critical approach to humorous communication. For example, Jonathan Swift's, *A Modest Proposal*, illustrated the capacity for satire to be used to ridicule government policy toward impoverished Irish citizens. It is important to note that satire does not necessitate laughableness as an essential component (Corum, 2002). Swift's suggestion of eating the poor children of his nation did not engender laughter as much as it highlighted bad governance. It is this incongruity between humor and politics that enables satire's subversive potential. Satire is supposed to be entertaining but the subversive element makes the purpose of satire greater than sole amusement. Although laughter is not required for a text to be considered satire, the literature indicates two crucial components: a historical context and a critical interrogation. In short, I define satire as a historically located, humorous criticism for the purpose of creating new knowledge.

Satirical communication is historically located. In order for audiences to understand a new worldview or cast judgments on an alternative, they must bring a prior, contextual knowledge of the concept in question. Brian A. Connery and Kirk Combe note that satire depends on historical specificity for its meaning: "Satire, more than other genres, emphasizes – indeed, is defined by – its intention (attack), an intention that again refers the reader to matter outside the text" (Gring-Pemble and Watson, 2003). In essence, audiences have to be informed on an issue before they can come to understand a satirical message. Audiences need to first recognize the historical context of a symbol before that symbol can be used as a critique. For example, the satirical form is inclusive

of imitation and alteration of direct quotations, textual rearrangement, substitution, etc. (Hariman, 2008). This imitation is often for the sake of providing a contextual education for the audience. In using techniques such as mimicry and parody, rhetors are able to call forth a particular worldview that correlates with the showcased substitution. Without knowledge of the poor governance experienced by the citizens of Ireland, Jonathan Smith's suggestion would have been met with criticism instead of acclaim.

Satire also offers a critique of a worldview. One of the earliest American authors on humor and rhetoric, Kenneth Burke, suggested that creating a conflict in concepts creates a clearer message by pushing each concept beyond its preconceived limits (1937/1984). For example, modern art juxtaposes distinct perspectives on the same canvas (Morris, 1993). In order to achieve the critical effect, satire will often contain aspects of mimicry, incongruity, and revision of the ideology under interrogation. This criticism will encourage either the rejection of the spotlighted worldview or an acceptance of a new ideology. Particularly, the satirical representation of a dominant discourse can work to shift and subvert those same dominant frames (Ritchie 2005; Shugart 1999). As Jonathan Smith's proposal for citizens to consume poor children was darkly preposterous, its greater function was to expose the failures of the status quo and shift public opinion towards empathizing with the nation's most marginalized identities. These interrogations prove useful in exposing hegemonic discourse. Still, this contrasting incongruity is only visible if the audience recognizes the systems of beliefs being communicated. Satirical contrast operates at an ideological level, in that it addresses worldviews and associated belief systems. A wider understanding of the

situation allows for audiences to decide for themselves if a message promotes unification or division.

Finally, the purpose of satirical humor is to create new knowledge. In defining satire, J.A. Cuddon details the judgmental nature of satirical work: “The satirist is thus a kind of self-appointed guardian of standards, ideals and truth; of moral as well as aesthetic values” (Gring-Pemble and Watson, 2003). Through the use of political humor, rhetors can successfully call forth a worldview and interrogate its merit in opposition to alternatives. This component positions satire to be a valuable social tool for promoting discourse amongst citizens. Importantly, Hariman notes the diagnostic function of parody; this mimicry is not solely for the sake of humor, but rather, societal deliberation. “Parody creates and sustains public consciousness first and foremost by exposing the limitations of dominant discourses: it counters idealization, mythic enchantment, and other forms of hegemony” (Hariman, 2008). Through a new perspective created by satirical representation, audiences can critically examine institutions that were previously untouchable. Ultimately, this public consciousness is a critical dialogic function in a democratic society.

## Visual Rhetoric and Street Art

Discourse on identity, humorous or otherwise, does not solely rely on the spoken word but rather, can readily be communicated through visual media. Whether the hieroglyphics in Egyptian pyramids or erotic messages found on the isles of Greece, ancient civilizations have long utilized visual artifacts to document their cultural existence. If these prehistoric images illustrate a reliance on seeing, that obsession has only grown with modernization. Visual communication scholars Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright note that over the past two centuries, Western culture has come to be dominated by the visual rather than the spoken or printed media (2009). The authors use the term “visual culture” to illustrate the many ways in which culture manifests in the visual form, such as, “paintings, drawings, prints, photographs, film, television, video, digital images, animation, graphic novels and comic books, popular culture, news images, entertainment, advertising, images as legal evidence, and science images.” If we live in a visual culture, the academic field of visual rhetoric attempts to understand that culture. Linda Lumsden (2010) defines visual rhetoric as “the study of the persuasive impact of images in combination with the written and spoken word.” From cave drawings to digital animation, humans utilize these media in order to communicate in complex and deeply resonating ways; to witness powerful images that create powerful persuasive experiences.

Visual media readily translates the intersection of humor and politics. Images alone can boast strong rhetorical power that subverts hegemonic norms. It is important to note that the use of words (captions, titles, etc.) in conjunction with and as a component of the visual image is not necessary for this conflict to take place. Biljana Scott (2004)

emphasizes how the use of images alone can summon and question a worldview through irony and incongruity:

It would seem then that if a system of beliefs is readily enough available (the very notion of ‘the usual scheme of things’ entails a system of belief), and that if an image can bring to mind this belief system by means of an easily identifiable symbol, then we do not need words in order to access a dominant representation. Once a world view has been summoned, the remainder of the picture must in some way question it in order to achieve ironic effect. The most obvious way of questioning it is by introducing an element of incongruity.

One technique of visual satire that exemplifies subversion through incongruity is the photomontage. By overlapping two juxtaposing photographs, rhetors create critical messages that audiences can understand by observing. “In so doing it is able to combine two conflicting orders of reality, and thus to expose the hypocrisy and illusions so often associated with the political arena” (Scott, 2004). The use of irony in photomontages illustrates the ability for satire to critique systems of belief without the use of the written or spoken word.

A similar visual media that engages satire is the political cartoon. The history of political cartoons reveals a visual critique of the economic, political, and social injustices of the time. Unlike lengthy orations or complicated narratives, political cartoons can collapse a complicated concept into a quick and efficient message. For example, political cartoons often display one person as a metaphorical representation of a larger group (Morris, 1993). Consequently, cartoons have long been employed to fight social injustice. Ranging from crude sketches to fine art, radical cartoons used visual rhetoric in the forms of symbolism, satire, juxtaposition, inversion, metaphor, stereotypes, irony, and iconography in an attempt to didactically mobilize the masses against corporate

capitalism. For example, black and white cartoons used these techniques to bolster radicalism in the years before World War I (Lumsden, 2010). Whether utilizing drawings, television, photography, or cartoons, rhetors have been successful at employing visual satire to communicate radical messages that are concerned with social injustice.

Graffiti and street art are nontraditional media that readily utilize the rhetorical techniques of satire. Activist artists employ city walls as contemporary public squares to communicate their politically charged messages. In their study on contemporary graffiti throughout university campuses, Rodriguez and Clair (1999) find that graffiti can be used to articulate identity, resistance, and oppression. To scrawl on the wall is a critical method of claiming human identity. For example, graffiti throughout New York City has been used to help negotiate social conflicts involving the use of urban spaces – specifically between marginalized populations and the property holding, power elite (Kramer, 2010). Graffiti and street art can employ visual rhetoric in order to highlight and critique social injustices. Historically, graffiti and tagging have developed in three major eras: first, the imitative phase was a mimicking of the perceived physical world; second, the transition phase witnessed graffiti being used to transmit messages of social expression; lastly, the apocryphal phase is indicative of cryptic messages of identity expression (Gross and Gross, 1993). The apocryphal phase of graffiti, whereby artists use cryptic messages for the expression of identities, engendered a newfound appreciation for nonconventional art. Specifically, graffiti culture and its attitude toward the world opened the doors for a new, post-graffiti movement: street art (Bou, 2005; MacNaughton, 2006; Chung, 2009). Unlike traditional tagging, which is predominately used to claim a public space, street art boasts a wide variety of forms and content.



As a global phenomenon, street art encompasses a diversity of virtual and physical forms including traditional and stencil graffiti, sticker art, video projection, poetry, and street installations (Borghini et. al., 2010). Bou (2005) also includes photocopies, murals, paper cutouts, mosaics, and performances. G. James Daichendt (2013) offers a few key distinctions between graffiti and street art:

In contrast, street art is less concerned with letters (although they may be used) but emphasizes the visual image, contextual use of space, and uses a wider range of materials that extend beyond the spray can. Street artists may also utilize the contextual aspects of the street and share some similarities to installation art. While a large flat wall with good visibility may suit a large piece by a graffiti artist, street artists may incorporate an element of a building, alley, or crack into their design. Ironically street art borders very closely to public art and may in some cases be confused, but it's the illegal and temporal qualities that differentiate it.

While graffiti originated as a tactic of expressing existence and power, street art takes on a much wider variety of form and content. Street art serves as the voice of the world around us and it has a rawness that is lacking in other forms of media (Lunn, 2006). Subsequently, street art exists as a highly accessible form of communication. Nicholas Alden Riggle (2010) notes that traditional art is expensive, requires extensive training, and its messages are limiting to the general public. “Serving as a direct response to traditional and classical art, this new method of art bolsters accessibility to the everyday consumer. Street art uniquely blurs the lines between hierarchical “high” and “low” conceptions of art by bringing art directly to the populace.” However, street art is quickly painted over by shop owners or tagged by other artists. “Banksy would undoubtedly argue that this transience is part of the very nature of street art” (Ellsworth-Jones, 2013). Still, as viewers photograph and share these striking images online, they can reach wider audiences with more lasting messages.

Graffiti and street art can sometimes survive its ephemeral nature through photography (whether amateur or professional) and through an online presence. Long after an installation has been physically dismantled, audiences can still receive it. In her analysis on the influence of graffiti in the Tunisian revolution, Nouredine Miladi (2015) explains the exponential power that the Internet provides to this communication phenomenon. She notes that graffiti is as effective and influential as social media because countless people from a variety of social classifications can view it. “It resists the limitations of time and space and can have a more lasting effect in reaching out to a wider public” (Miladi, 2015). Through displays in public spaces, graffiti and street artists can access wider audiences. Further, photography and the Internet help facilitate even longer installments of street art – even if the art is forcibly removed. For example, Mina Ivanova (2014) notes how the Bulgarian government was quick to erase the graffiti from its monument and voice a counter narrative through a 3D visual show. Still, the subversive burlesque graffiti maintains a presence online through photographs, message boards, social media, and academic discourse. By using humor, rhetors create representations that their audiences can adopt or reject. These images create worldviews that are perpetuated throughout the audience’s communities. For example, Leslie Fishbein argues that radical artists in the early twentieth century created, “a new genre of politically conscious art intended as a weapon in the class struggle” (Lumsden, 2010). These rhetorical messages have successfully fostered collective identities for social movements.

## Satire as Subversion

With a grounded understanding of what constitutes satire and its extensive application, the greater challenge is to map how it functions. Kenneth Burke's work on dramatism developed the comic frame, in which audiences can see the follies of the status quo not as malicious but comically correctable. As satire sandwiches two incongruous concepts to create new knowledge, in *Attitudes Toward History*, Burke (1937/1984) speaks to the diagnostic prowess of planned incongruity and its intent of social improvement:

The deterioration that would go with the democratization of planned incongruity should be matched, we hold, by a corresponding improvement in the quality of popular sophistication, since it would liquidate belief in the absolute truth of concepts by reminding us that the mixed dead metaphors of abstract thought are metaphors nonetheless. It should *make one at home* in the complexities of relativism, whereas one now tends to be *bewildered* by relativism. And relativism cannot be eliminated by the simple legislative decrees of secular prayer (as when one tries to exorcize it by verbally denying its presence). We must erect new co-ordinates *atop* it, not *beneath* it. For this reason we hold that a popular understanding of the rational pun, as made bureaucratically available by a "methodology of the pun," should be a *social* improvement.

While Burke does not specifically mention satire here, the social-improving nature of planned incongruity corresponds with its utility in bolstering public consciousness. "The audience, from its vantage point, sees the operation of errors that the characters of the play cannot see; thus seeing from two angles at once, it is chastened by dramatic irony" (Burke, 1954). These not seen before perspectives help audiences critically reflect, on previously known concepts, in new and exciting ways.

Anne Teresa Demo (2000) builds on Burke's work and articulates that the comic frame and strategies of incongruity are uniquely interrelated. The mechanisms of

perspective by incongruity and the comic frame can engender a social criticism that seeks to correct inadequacies of the status quo through demystification rather than revolution (Burke, 1937/1984). Burke calls this process of demystification “atom cracking,” a metaphor that identifies the “highly charged nature of the symbolic alchemy produced when differing rhetorical/ideological orientations mix” (Demo, 2000). By riding the coattails of established “forms or materials” associated with an ideology, marginalized rhetors can create a perspective by incongruity that highlights social inequities (Radner & Lanser, 1993). Through a reordering of words and images (that communicate values and ideologies) in an incongruous facility, a situation is reconsidered through a raising in consciousness (Dow, 1994). The ultimate goal, as Barry Brummet notes, is “awareness of these contradictions and of the harm to society that they cause” (1984). Satire does not need to single-handedly dismantle an ideology for its employment to be deemed a success. Rather, the identification of previously hidden or disguised oppressive concepts by audiences is a success in the expansion of social consciousness.

One such movement has been orchestrated by an anonymous group of women named the Guerilla Girls. These unidentified artists utilized a variety of disruptive and subversive techniques to voice a feminist critique of the modern art world. For example, the group recreated Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres’s *Grande Odalisque* by overlaying a gorilla mask on the female subject’s head and publishing the photomontage on a billboard with the text, “Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?” This juxtaposition serves to question why women “have been disproportionately represented in museums of art not as artists but as subjects of works of art, often in states of undress” (Sturken and Cartwright, 2009). Gorilla masks on nude figures are simply

one method the group used to expose the irony of male-dominated, female-nude-centric art. Ultimately, the Guerilla Girls were able to construct a feminist resistance. The group successfully challenged patriarchal normativity in the art world via their employment of strategies of incongruity to articulate a comic politic of subversion. While the Guerilla Girls utilized a tactic of Kenneth Burke – perspective by incongruity – their greater purpose was to disrupt and subvert the hegemony of traditionally male-dominated art.

Demo explains:

Even though perspective by incongruity structures the Guerilla Girls' rhetoric, its more general function is to create a comic politics of subversion and is, therefore, closely linked to Burke's discussion of the comic frame. The Guerilla Girls' rhetoric, then, demonstrates how planned incongruity not only pokes fun at the failures of the social structure but also offers a comic corrective to such failings.

By using comedic techniques that emphasize incongruity – specifically mimicry, feminist reimagining, and juxtaposition – the Guerilla Girls were able to successfully raise consciousness about feminist art resistance, expose the patriarchal restrictions of contemporary art, and successfully subvert the hegemonic narratives of the modern art world. Mimicry involves adopting an exaggerated version of a concept, historical revision calls forth an incongruous recreation of history, and strategic juxtaposition mixes dominant symbols with a unique aesthetic (Demo, 2000). These tactics are employed to subvert the male hegemony of modern art and educate audiences through humor. The Guerilla Girls utilized billboards, spray paint, live performance, their own magazine, and countless other means of feminist subversion to successfully combat the art world's dismissal of female artists. In parallel, one anonymous street artist, Banksy, employs strategies of incongruity to spotlight sociopolitical injustice through street art.

## **Banksy**

Banksy intentionally interrogates the social construction behind both the form and content of traditional art. Sheng Kuan Chung notes that the artist stimulates political dialogue on social issues by generating ephemeral, provocative, and resistive, site-specific art that often speaks for marginalized populations. “Banksy’s pieces lead viewers to reflect on established social practices, including the treatment of animals in zoos, the power of the art world to define standards, and the reluctance of populations to confront social and cultural aspects of who we are and what we do” (Chung, 2009). Even more distinct, there are three exceptional attributes that are critical to understand the implications of Banksy’s work. In particular, street art by Banksy is site-specific, legally perplexing, and subsequently, uniquely preserved.

First, Banksy is highly calculative of where they stage their street art. Although earlier works of the artist featured a style of stenciling that showcased disgruntled rats and chimpanzees, Banksy’s work evolved into critiques of social issues such as child labor, British police, and power dynamics in ongoing political conflicts (Sweeny, 2013). However, it did not take long for the anonymous artist to move beyond the United Kingdom (where their work supposedly originates). While working on the street, location often provides a springboard for the particular sociopolitical injustice(s) Banksy critiques in their art. For example, Christopher Kirsch (2010) details the artist’s motivation in New Orleans and the subsequent reaction by the local population:

Banksy’s New Orleans pieces demonstrate characteristically on-target commentary on the city’s faltering recovery, racial and class conflict, the corruption of law enforcement (though his looters might have been more accurately depicted in police uniforms) and the mindless zealousness of local anti-graffiti crusaders. Within months much of Banksy’s work had

been defaced, obscured, or stolen; in some cases the buildings on which they were painted were torn down. Nevertheless the pieces were extensively documented by photographers, and some of the surviving pieces have been covered by plexiglas to protect them. Banksy's images, the real and the spectral, have become a part of the post-Katrina landscape.

Location is a crucial component to any Banksy installation, as the geography establishes both the physical parameters of a piece in conjunction with its social inspiration. Further, because Banksy uses the streets to showcase art, the message reaches an even greater population. "As a vernacular art form, street art, such as the work of British artist Banksy deals with activism, reclamation, and subversion and allows artists a platform to reach a broader audience than traditional art forms" (Chung, 2009). Not only does the location inspire the art, but also, the art further connects those in that location to the sociopolitical injustices spotlighted through the art.

Next, the preservation of Banksy street art is nothing short of spectacular. In parallel with most of their work, Banksy uploads pictures to their website and, sometimes, preserves the work through documentary-style footage. For example, after the artist installed a piece of street art in Disneyland, the work maintained a presence both online and in Banksy's film *Exit Through the Gift Shop* (Nath, 2013). Despite the inherently ephemeral quality of graffiti street art, audiences also preserve the works of Banksy in a variety of ways. In their analysis on Banksy's artistic canvases throughout Detroit, Julie Pincus and Nichole Christian (2014) detail the preservation of one Banksy work in the motor city. Artists from Detroit's 555 Nonprofit Gallery took an entire fifteen-hundred-pound wall that was home to a Banksy using an oxyacetylene torch, mini-tractor, and a gas-powered masonry saw. The artists from 555 removed the mural

from the plant in order to save it from destruction by a bulldozer that was clearing the site for demolition (Stryker, 2015). These actions are not the exception, as the hijacking of Banksy's works is a well-documented phenomenon (Salib, 2015; Lerman, 2013). Still, not all audiences are quite so possessive and work to preserve Banksy's in order to widen audience availability. Some proprietors preserve pieces by installing Plexiglas over the street art (Yakas, 2013; Tucker, 2015). Even the locals will roll up their sleeves to help keep Banksy's art accessible – after one Banksy work in New York City was defaced by another artist's tagging, an audience member helped restore the original work (Vincent et al. 2015). Banksy is such an important cultural phenomenon that some snatch Banksy's art off of the streets for capitalist exploitation and destruction, while other audience members strive to preserve the art for art's sake.

Finally, Banksy further complicates the legal entanglement of graffiti. Street art exists in a legal grey space, where some pieces are labeled art and others are labeled as vandalism. Banksy's work, in particular, often increases the value of a property rather than lowering it. In an essay considering the legal ramifications of this predicament, Ian Edwards (2009) explains:

But how does the law treat the graffiti artist who claims although he did not ask the owner first he honestly believed the property owner would think the mural a great work of art? For example, some of Banksy's images have been painted without the permission of the owner, yet the owner has come to like and cherish the images, and this might foster a belief that other property owners will have a similar affection for future works.

Ironically, Banksy's graffiti street art often proves to substantially increase the economic value of a property; thereby any charging of the artist's work as property damage would prove difficult to ascertain in a court of law. Street art by Banksy "forces us to confront



law's role in regulating artistic expression in public spaces" (Edwards, 2009). Simply put, the criminalization of street art remains a balancing act amongst law enforcement officials, property owners, and creative street artists. These legal limits are exacerbated even further because street art by Banksy is desirable by property owners, even if installed illegally.

To briefly conclude, visual communication studies the rhetorical functions of symbolic imagery and satire is a genre of communication that engages both the political and the humorous. Satire uses a historically located system of beliefs to offer a critique that creates new knowledge about those ideologies. This literature review explored how strategies of incongruity can be employed to successfully expose hypocrisy and the hegemony of dominant discourses. When audiences are able to see dominant institutions from new perspectives, it can cause "atom-cracking" in which old ideologies fall to make way for new ones. These institutions do not need to immediately fall for this discourse to be considered successful. Rather, simply the creation of this new, critical knowledge is valuable in advancing a democratic society. This revolutionary discourse and its potent effects have been documented across visual media ranging from political cartoons to creative photography. Another popular medium of visual communication that often includes this subversive satire is graffiti and street art. Artists such as Banksy utilize unconventional methods in eccentric spaces in order to increase the size of their audience and amplify the ways in which their messages are received.

## **Chapter II: Methodology (Comic Politics of Subversion)**

This thesis is a rhetorical analysis, utilizing Anne Teresa Demo's development of a comic politics of subversion. Burke's insights offer a foundational framework for understanding the potential liberatory component of humor. Demo (2000) expanded upon Burke's work and analyzed the Guerilla Girls' use of subversive humor to disrupt hegemonic narratives and liberate feminist art. Demo articulated that the strategic placing of incongruous symbols enables atom cracking, a phrase by Burke to indicate the disruption of accepted norms, whereby old structures fall in order to allow for new structures to rise. Specifically, Demo identifies three key strategies of incongruity used by the Guerilla Girls that facilitate the subversive atom cracking – mimicry, historical revision, and strategic juxtapositions. By revealing the ways in which Banksy deploys these strategies of incongruity to unite hegemonic narratives and the social injustices they facilitate, I will analyze how these tools of subversive humor can enable atom cracking and foster liberatory potential.

First, mimicry involves the exaggeration of existing power structures. This particular strategy of incongruity allows for audiences to understand context as they can readily identify a preexisting institution. In his expansive analysis on parody, Robert Hariman notes that the use of humor as a rhetorical frame allows for audiences to determine whether or not a message resonates with their own identity. "Whatever the authority of a discourse, those who are seeing it as an image, as a mask that has been revealed to be a mask, now have the capacity to judge whether it represents their own condition" (Hariman, 2008). Audiences are more capable of interrogating an ideology

through imitation because this particular strategy helps demystify the hegemonic power of ideologies. “The Guerilla Girls’ name, appearance, and visual style all illustrate how feminists can subvert a static definition of femininity through mimicry” (Demo, 2001). By imitating ideologies that oppress femininity, the Guerilla Girls are able to encourage audiences to question said ideologies. Whether in content or form, the core concept of parody involves the recreation and exaggeration of some preexisting concept.

Second, historical revision offers a critical reimagining of a history that was oppressive to particular cultures. For example, one goal of the Guerilla Girls is that the group strives to “avenge the omission of women artists from art history” (Demo, 2001). They achieve this strategy in their book, *The Guerilla Girls’ Bedside Companion to the History of Art*, by providing a history-by-incongruity that emphasizes highlighting female artists and exposing discrimination within the art world. Further, the artists create a variety of imaginary conversations between the group and deceased female artists to help audiences understand the unique challenges of being a female artist during particular historical eras. Whereas mimicry offers a contextual locus for audiences to understand the ideologies being called forth for interrogation, historical revision provides an incongruous juxtaposition with that ideology to actually illustrate the faults hidden amongst its hegemony.

Lastly, strategic juxtaposition positions two incongruous concepts in contrast with one another. Similar to historical revision, this strategy emphasizes a cognitive dissonance between worldviews that audiences experience when asked to simultaneously consider two conflicting realities. The Guerilla Girls executed this strategy by juxtaposing quotations with ironic captions, images with rhetorical questions, and

dominant culture symbols with the Guerilla Girls' unique brand of feminist aesthetics. This strategy is readily identified by the group's use of Ingres's *Grande Odalisque* and a gorilla mask but it is even more amplified by their caption. In offering incongruous imagery, "the Guerilla Girls illustrate how history can be re-presented" (Demo, 2001). For this specific example, that history is re-presented in a way that empowers both the feminine form and female artists that choose to explore its representation.

Banksy employs all three of these strategies. In particular, they are utilized throughout the artifacts of this study, which are composed of street art from Banksy's 2013 series, *Better Out Than In*. These artifacts were chosen because they are counter-hegemonic and they are some of the Banksy's most radical street art. Additionally, these installations are from the same gallery and use a variety of forms, which include film, graffiti, and performance. While Banksy has previously used graffiti to spotlight social injustices, these artifacts are some of the first times that he incorporated performance and digital animation. The first artifact, *Rebel Rocket Attack*, was an online installation as Banksy uploaded a self-made video to YouTube that included both live action and digital animation. The second artifact, *Crazy Horses Riding Through the Lower East Side to a WikiLeaks Soundtrack*, was a graffiti illustration that sprawled across two different vehicles and was installed in an empty lot on New York's Lower East Side. The third artifact, *Shoe Shine*, combined a sculpture with a living performance artist and was originally debuted in front of a McDonalds in the Bronx. In the analysis that follows, I critique the persuasive ways in which Banksy employs the strategies of incongruity in order to represent the injustices that these hegemonic institutions employ, allowing audiences the opportunity to atom-crack these established norms through individualized

resistance. This study analyzes how Banksy's street art illustrates the ideological construction of hegemonic narratives that perpetuate sociopolitical injustices. Banksy's art offers representations of social, political, and economic injustices through its form, content, and location. By employing mimicry, historical revision, and strategic juxtaposition Banksy exposes the ideologies that maintain oppressive power structures and offers individual praxis as a form of resistance.

In each of the following analyses, I first, briefly provide the context surrounding these topics and offer a description of the audience experience from the installations. Then, I analyze how Banksy employs satire as a subversive rhetorical technique to expose audiences to surrounding sociopolitical injustices. Banksy's art offers disruptive and radical perspectives of relations to labor, security, and capital. I argue that Banksy's art is liberatory because it demystifies hegemony through a comic politic of subversion, offering individualized opportunities for resisting sociopolitical injustices. Banksy uses street art to spotlight the victimization inflicted by social, political, and economic institutions. These works snare audience's attention and offer a reimagining of the function and purpose of satire. Further, the artist intentionally utilizes street art as the canvas for their subversive humor. Banksy is so famous that they could be featured in the most known museums in the world. Yet, Banksy intentionally breaks the law in their installation of street art in these locations. As a result, the subversive power of Banksy's rhetorical messages is communicated in part by that illegality. The artist persuades audiences to witness the hidden oppression that American hegemony relies upon and to adopt an ideology that rejects these sociopolitical injustices.

**Interlude: Artifacts from *Better Out Than In*  
*Rebel Rocket Attack***



"I'm not posting any pictures today. Not after this shocking footage has emerged. Go to [banksy.co.uk](http://banksy.co.uk) for the full video" (Banksy, 2013).

*Crazy Horses Riding Through the Lower East Side to a WikiLeaks Soundtrack*



"Lower East Side" (Banksy, 2013).

*Shoe Shine*



"All City – McDonalds" (Banksy, 2013).



### Chapter III: Analysis

#### *Rebel Rocket Attack*

Terrorism manifests in a variety of both domestic and international political discussions and still has an incredibly personal relationship with New York City. It resurfaced again on the sixth day of residency when Banksy uploaded an online short film to YouTube entitled *Rebel Rocket Attack*. Along with the video, the artist's homepage noted, "I'm not posting any pictures today. Not after this shocking footage has emerged" (Banksy, 2013). The "footage" refers to the artist's own video that recreates a Syrian helicopter takedown. Following the outbreak of the civil war, amateur viral videos began to emerge showing Syrian rebels successfully shooting down a helicopter belonging to the Assad regime. Supporters of the attack took to social media showcasing their tactical success with widespread viewership. "The videos appear roughly consistent with a claim, posted to Facebook by the Local Coordination Committees of Syria, a rebel umbrella group, that 'The Free Syrian Army has downed an attack helicopter using anti-aircraft weapons in the Sheikh Salman area in the western countryside'" (Fisher, 2012). Aerial superiority has remained a staple of the state-sponsored violence and this amateur footage illustrated the rebel's tenacity to fight back. The destruction of the helicopter did little to advance the military prowess of the rebels. However, the successful strike became an important ideological landmark in the history of the Syrian civil war.

In satirical contrast, Banksy's film showed men shooting a rocket launcher into the sky. After successfully hitting their target, which was the famous Disney character Dumbo, the men celebrated as the cartoon elephant died at their feet. The 2012 rebel takedown of a Syrian helicopter represented an ideological rallying point for those

opposed to state-sponsored oppression; Banksy's *Rebel Rocket Attack* recreated these events. Banksy's sixth installation of *Better Out Than In* was the first piece in the exhibition that was entirely online. While the six previous installations were positioned around New York City with clues to the locations being teased on the artist's website, viewership for *Rebel Rocket Attack* was entirely digital. "Some thought that the appearance of Dumbo references DUMBO, the part of Brooklyn "Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass" (Donayre & Sen, 2013).

At the opening of the ninety-second video, a man is seen holding a rocket launcher aimed towards the sky with the sound of consecutive distant gunshots. As the cameraman steps behind the shooter, two more men come into the frame. In all, three men are seen on a mountainside: one holding a rocket launcher, one watching idle, and another pointing towards the clouds in an otherwise clear sky. The icon for Al Jazeera, a prominent news agency, hovers in the bottom-left corner of the screen. All of the men wear traditional Middle Eastern dress; long flowing shirts, loose fabric pants, and turbans. The man holding the rocket launcher wears a camouflage jacket. Throughout the film, all verbal communication is in Arabic. One man says "It's coming, it's coming!" After a few moments, the phrase "allahu-Akbar" is heard and then repeated by the cameraman. Next, the frame of the shot shakes as the rocket launcher fires with a trail of smoke following it into the sky. Immediately upon firing, the Al Jazeera logo fades away and does not return. The cameraman zooms in on one cloud in particular and captures a small aerial explosion while yelling, "Praise to God!" After zooming out the frame, all three men raise their fists in celebration; the shooter fist-pumps the sky, the second man jumps with excitement, and the third bows toward the explosion. An

unidentified voice states, “Mohammad is the messenger of Allah!” Once again, the camera zooms in on the sky only to see a dark accumulation of smoke bellowing towards the frame as the shooter says, “Divine beauty!” The now panicked men quickly duck for cover and one shouts, “Here it comes!” as the camera frame jumps sporadically.

The scene abruptly pauses via an apparent dropping of the camera as the frame glitches to black. Suddenly, the view regains clarity as the men happily surround their newly fallen target, Disney’s famous cartoon carnival elephant, Dumbo. Excitedly, one man advances on the cartoon elephant and climbs upon its back. The fallen elephant looks desperately from side-to-side before sadly gazing directly upon the camera. Meanwhile, the man happily jumps up and down on Dumbo’s back, repeatedly raising his hands to the sky and shooting his rifle in celebration. Suddenly, a child, dressed similarly to the men, runs into the frame toward the fallen elephant. Upon seeing the child, the cartoon elephant squeaks one final breath before collapsing. Dumbo’s eyes roll to the sides, his tongue flopped out of his mouth, ears now flaccid, as his chin crashes to the ground. As the child watches the elephant die, the shooter advances behind them. Suddenly, the young person turns around and kicks the assassin in the shin. The shooter grabs their wounded leg while cartoonishly hopping on one foot before falling to the ground. The camera zooms out, showing the now-wounded shooter, child, and celebrating rebel, the footage appears to glitch, as the images remain frozen in place, before the frame suddenly goes to black (Banksy, 2013).

Banksy is notorious for their flamboyant and politically charged messages. *Rebel Rocket Attack* maintains the themes that the anonymous artist is known to illustrate. By imitating nonfiction footage, the artist primes the audience to consume media involving

militarized violence. In fact, viewers of Banksy's film used YouTube to discover that the audio came from a video showing footage of Syrian rebel terrorists launching missiles (Donayre and Sen, 2013). By using audio from the real world events, Banksy immerses the audience to a point of mimicry. The footage recreates the events of Middle Eastern-resembling rebels scuttling to aim and deploy a rocket launcher towards the sky and it appropriates the Al Jazeera symbolism to illustrate that the entire video is a parody of "real" news footage.

Additionally, *Rebel Rocket Attack* provides mimicry of the ideology of violent extremism. There are many images in the film that illustrate the prevalence of this ideology. The unlikelihood of a civilian owning a rocket launcher illustrates worldviews involving militarization. However, the main characters have guns drawn but are not dressed in any formalized military uniform. As a result, mimicry of violent extremism is visually identifiable. Next, the audio is comprised of gunshots, the rocket launch, and the men vehemently chanting the phrase "allahu-Akbar." Undoubtedly, the first two dominant sounds – gunshots and a weaponized rocket launch – are associated with violence. The rebels use violence to achieve their end and they equally fire their rifles in celebration. The final dominant audio theme is religiously motivated chanting. Although the phrase "allahu-Akbar" could be utilized more traditionally, its use in the film is excessive to the point of extremism. Additionally, no other religious symbols are prevalent throughout the digital text. The agents chant the phrase, often screaming it nearly thirty times, averaging once every three seconds. It is blaringly excessive (to the point of comedy) and illustrative of an ideology embellished with violent extremism. By employing mimicry in a highly calculated fashion, Banksy is able to call forth a

worldview for the audience to interrogate radically violent, Islamic resistance to western civilization. This mimicry makes the strategic juxtapositions all the more powerful.

Next, strategic juxtaposition is evident throughout the piece. For one, it is aesthetically jarring to the audience when they are able to first recognize the large, flying, cartoon mammal because it is the only digital subject in the film. The use of Dumbo as the target illustrates another ideological purpose of the juxtaposition: the extremists in the film are resistant to innocence, happiness, and westernization. It is important strategic juxtaposition that Banksy combines weapons with non-military attire and violence with religious chanting, as these juxtapositions not only bring a particular ideology to the audience's mind, but also, encourages the audience to interrogate those incongruous combinations. Additionally, the presence of the child in what seems like a warzone provides another juxtaposition. The clothing of the child is similar to the adults, however, the behavior by the child illustrates that they are unlike the other men in the film. The juvenile does not speak, remains unarmed, and does not illustrate any agency beyond their courage to kick the elephant's assassin. The striking of an elder is another juxtaposition because while the armed adults attack a passively flying cartoon, the child attacks an aggressive rebel equipped with a rocket launcher. Moreover, the rebels utilize a mechanical means of attack whereas the child uses their own corporeal flesh as the ultimate site of resistance. Further, Dumbo's death provides an incongruous juxtaposition because the Disney cartoon is otherwise immortal. Each of these incongruous combinations offers an ideological tilt to Banksy's film. In kicking the assassin, the child illustrates courage to risk sacrificing its own body as the means to a greater end. Through strategic juxtapositions, Banksy forces audiences to question why

extremists use violence against innocents. By further pairing incongruous symbols, the artist offers a glimpse of how even the smallest of us can fight back, which signifies Banksy's prevailing ideology of resistance to this kind of violent extremism.

Lastly, unlike the original footage, Banksy's video provides a resolution that offers a historical revision. In the resolution scene of *Rebel Rocket Attack*, a small child kicks the film's antagonist in the shin. "As it becomes clear they've hit Dumbo, the rebels cheer and jump over the battered and bruised elephant. A young accomplice isn't too amused, however, kicking his elder on seeing his cartoon hero suffering" (O'Brien, 2013). In this way, the child in Banksy's *Rebel Rocket Attack* forces audiences to reconsider the original Syrian air strike from a new perspective. By inflicting violence against the elephant's attacker, the child's agency illustrates at least two new ideological components to the audience: that the *Rebel Rocket Attack* was not righteous and that there is something that can be done about it. When Banksy has the shooter hop around in an animated fashion after being kicked before ultimately falling over, audiences see a second successful act of violence. However, this time history has been revised. This child is small, roughly one third of the size of the rocket launcher equipped rebel, and yet, the young hero stands victorious. Banksy recreates the attack to show audiences that even in the face of violence, the smallest of those amongst us can stand up and resist.

There are a variety of reads that audiences could take from Banksy's *Rebel Rocket Attack*. As rebels shoot down Disney's Dumbo and subsequently celebrate the elephant's demise, this could symbolize the takedown of Western pop culture or globalization at large. However, the introduction of the child acts as an intentional and direct response to the shooting down of Dumbo. This leads audiences to read a resistance to extremism, as

the youth does not respond when Dumbo is attacked. Rather, it is following the final breath taken by the elephant - the symbolic death of innocence - that the child uses their own body to engage in resistance of extremism. In this way, Banksy illustrated a worldview that is confident in the strength of resisting extremism via individual agency.

The rebel takedown of a Syrian helicopter represented an ideological rallying point for those opposed to state-sponsored oppression; Banksy's *Rebel Rocket Attack* recreated these events in an effort to maintain a public conscious of the ongoing civil war in Syria. Perhaps more importantly, it was embedded with visual cues that encouraged audiences to resist violence. By attacking Dumbo, violence was shown as a means to resist western civilization and destroy innocence. However, the film proceeded to interrogate the merits of this methodology and illustrated the courage of a child to remain resistant to violent extremism. Banksy's *Rebel Rocket Attack* took a rhetorical stance against violence across the globe by showing that children can serve as an exemplar of an individualized solution for personal resistance. The film's continued presence online offers a text accessible to all, reminding the world of the violence that permeates throughout Syria, the violence that is employed to resist hegemonic ideologies, and the individual solutions to combat it.

### ***Crazy Horses***

The Iraq War exists as a long and painful blight on American foreign policy. The topic again came into focus for the American public when Banksy utilized real-world audio of the war to amplify a street art installation. On April 5, 2010, the popular whistleblower website, WikiLeaks, which considers itself “an intelligence agency of the people,” uploaded edited footage of a classified military airstrike under the title “Collateral Murder.” “The clip in question, taken from a camera affixed to an Apache helicopter flown by US troops, showed Americans opening fire on civilians and journalists” (RT, 2013). The provocative footage illustrated the brutality of the attack, the innocence of those assassinated, and perhaps most disturbingly, soldiers are heard laughing at the plight of their victims. Nick Wing (2013) of the Huffington Post described the confidential airstrike videotape:

A Reuters photographer and his driver were among those killed in the attack. When a good samaritan came to pick up those injured in the first round of fire, the helicopter unleashed another hail of 30mm bullets on the civilian's van. The driver of that vehicle was killed, and his two children were severely injured. The military initially claimed that the episode had led to the death of nine insurgents and two civilians, though the video suggests that only one person was armed, and had never shot at U.S. troops.

The release of *Collateral Murder* was highly controversial and contributed to public opposition of the U.S. occupation of Iraq. Accordingly, Banksy took the opportunity to utilize the audio footage through unconventional means.

Titled *Crazy Horses Riding Through the Lower East Side to a WikiLeaks Soundtrack*, Banksy's piece on October 9, 2013 was one of the artist's most disconsolate illustrations. The inclusion of the WikiLeaks audio file positioned the text as a darkly satirical message that promoted an ideological opposition to U.S. occupation of Iraq. In



an effort to maximize viewership, the artist increased audience accessibility by installing the piece on a vacant lot. *Crazy Horses* was available for viewership at 159 Ludlow Street. Although the art was locked behind a chain-link fence, some audiences were compelled to climb the barricade for a closer view; hundreds of fans, fellow artists, and locals visited the graffiti installment (Stebener, 2013). Featuring a somber theme, reared horses, and cross hairs —viewers commented on the heightened sense of severity in the artist’s work; “Banksy has been erecting street art in New York over the past fortnight but this elaborate graffiti is his most disturbing and politically-charged yet” (Evans, 2013). It didn’t take long for participating audiences to understand the severity of the accompanying audio file, as one viewer noted, "I thought someone was playing Call of Duty at first and then I realized. It's definitely one of his more serious pieces" (Stebener, 2013). By juxtaposing visual imagery with the audio file, *Crazy Horses* communicated an unyielding message: that the airstrikes were unjustified. The illustration existed as the sum of two vehicles, which added a textual depth to the graffiti. The inclusion of an audio file denoted the art’s platform as separated, yet, cohesive. *Crazy Horses* consisted of scattered pieces that unified to harmonize in a powerful message of opposition to the Iraq War.

Two vehicles were used as a canvas for the graffiti illustration. The first was a four-door car that sat directly in front of a larger truck trailer; the car was black, the trailer was white, and the vehicles had each been spray-painted to create the dramatic scene. In the center of the black car, a man on one knee looked to the sky. The man had an exposed left chest and his right arm grasped another hand of a faceless person. A small child was huddled behind the man and looked towards the audience. The

windshield was painted to look like it had been cracked by several bullet holes; a multitude of cross hairs were also spray-painted across the scene. Next, a larger truck trailer, placed directly behind the car, showcased three large horses embellished with night vision goggles that stamped onward. The left horse was black with its head bent forward; in the center, a white horse reared up, taller than the others; the right horse was gray, wore a collar, and a larger version of the goggles that all three sported. Only the center horse was reared to show off its two front legs, while the other two horses were drawn from the neck up. The three horses charged with their hair blown back, and showed stern faces with mouths wide open. Lastly, the installment included an assortment of oil drums with one that featured a 1-800 telephone number. Upon calling the anonymous line, audiences listened to an edited audio clip from *Collateral Murder*. Banksy's piece was comprised of illustrations on two different vehicles and an accompanying audio file. The three components synchronized into a resonating rhetorical text of street art that exemplified a comic politics of subversion.

The application of mimicry in *Crazy Horses* aided audiences to recognize the horses as the United States military and the prostrated people as Iraqi civilians. Banksy's text employed mimicry to represent power divisions by employing real-world audio from *Collateral Damage*. As soldiers utilized the alias "Crazy Horse" while radioing back and forth, the horses symbolically represented vast amounts of physical power and superiority employed via the U.S. military. Beyond the audio, Banksy strategically employed mimicry through the visual representation of power structures. The horses illustrated hegemonic strength, due in structural part to the use of a towering large truck trailer. Not only were the beasts painted on the larger vehicle, but their size was also exaggerated.

As the horses were displayed in this manner, Banksy strategically imitated the key figures in the original airstrike footage. In the graffiti, all three horses stood over the persons. Not only was the size of the horse's canvas physically larger as the trailer was taller than the car, but also the horses were positioned to be rising above the victims. Additionally, the center horse reared up while looking downward, positioned opposite the man knelt on the ground. It is also important to note that the horse's mouths are all open, and the far-left, black horse boasted a chilling grin. All three of the horses galloped forward, their manes blown back as they charged ahead, whereas the people painted on the car appeared to be paralyzed with fear. Large horses and small people mimic the power divisions that were present during the event. Because Banksy positioned the vehicles and characters this way, audiences watched horses conquer trembling victims.

Further, Banksy utilized mimicry of technology. For example, the horses were armed with night-vision goggles and the people sat defenseless under crosshairs. Each of the three horses wore sniper goggles to illustrate another amplification of power over their victims. All of the three stallions wore unique goggles, which added more visual depth to the piece. While the white and black horses donned eyewear similar to binoculars, the grey horse's goggles were more bulky. This boxier pair did not glow in the eyes, but featured a more detailed ability to zoom-in, knobs for adjusting, and a periscope. The grey horse was also the only horse with a bit in its mouth that was attached to its reins. Although the technology that this steed wielded was more sophisticated, it was also more controlled. Additionally, the victims were covered in cross hairs, which illustrated that technology is symbolic of the highly educated and tactically calculated military airstrike. In Banky's scene, the horses utilized technology

against their victims. By positioning the symbols in this way, Banksy did not simply illustrate a utilization of technology, but also that of a technological advantage. The horses were already larger and stronger, holding an advantage in hegemonic strength as they towered over the trembling people. Banksy gave the horses the additional power multiplier of their goggles. The persons cowered in fear as they awaited their fate on the streets of Baghdad, which was symbolized through the use of cross hairs; the horses maintained superior vision from their eyes in the skies, symbolized through their goggles. These seemingly innocuous details were harnessed to represent the real-world power dynamics. Through mimicry, the artist offered a worldview that promoted resistance to the airstrikes.

Strategic juxtaposition took a variety of forms including size and color. The horses resided on a large trailer while the people resided on a car, and this juxtaposition in size illustrated a powerful rhetoric from the artist because the positioning made it look like the horses had trampled the people. Additionally, the horses were painted with dark colors on a light background, which foreshadowed death. While the people were painted with white on a black canvas that symbolized innocence victimized. *Crazy Horses* offered a black-and-white, ghastly tone. The only other color in the piece was a greenish glow that existed on the eyes of two horses and on the crosshairs that covered the persons. The monochromatic colors displayed an emotion of terror that permeated the piece. The horses were all painted with dark shades, although the centered horse was white, and its chest was covered in a shadow and its hair was completely black. Both the left and the right horses were painted very dark, with the left horse was completely black. The dark horses on a white canvas made them appear ghoulish. The color in the horses

was more rustic. Wide strokes and unpredictable lines made the color of the horses look almost transparent and not affixed to their canvas, like a blur of destruction that unrelentingly stampeded ahead. All of the goggles' lenses were pitch black, which alluded to knowledge of death and war. The persons were all painted white and were much more rigid; fine lines clearly marked the beginnings of one person with the end of another. The persons were painted on a black car, which enhanced the angelic attributes of their white torsos, arms, and faces. Furthermore, the persons were painted within a glowing frame that was somewhat referential to a halo whereas the horses were painted on a grey, ominous background. As the horses charged forward, they summoned a dark storm of death and doom. The people trembled, as their bodies longed for compassion and mercy.

Additionally, the inclusion of the audio file offered a strategic juxtaposition. In both the original film and the art installation, only the voices of soldiers were heard. The audience never learned the narrative of the victims, only what the soldiers had portrayed of them. The fallen corpses were mocked and scolded; vivid language in the audio portrayed a hierarchy that considered the soldiers' authority more highly valued than the life of the victims. Even more frightening, soldiers were heard in the WikiLeaks audio saying, "Come on, let us shoot!" The U.S. personnel responsible for the deaths of innocent civilians, including children, were aroused by the power they wielded. Their superior positionality gave them an excitement that could only be quelled if they were authorized to kill human beings. The employment of audio created a strategic juxtaposition and immersed audiences into Banksy's representations. Absent the audio, audiences would have experienced greater difficulty understanding the context of the

piece. The inclusion of the audio with the graffiti imagery of horses trampling people created a strategic juxtaposition where American civilians view their military as a stampede running over targeted, innocent victims. This rhetorical tactic encouraged audiences to interrogate their belief that the U.S. military is morally righteous.

Lastly, Banksy employed historical revision. In their recreation of the events of the Baghdad airstrike, the artist demonized U.S. military superiority. The gaze of the people is critical to note. One person was more visible than the rest: impeccable detail illustrated a centered, kneeling man's face that looked up to the sky. The man clutched onto the arm of another person standing directly in front of him; a small child stood directly behind the centered man and looked directly toward the audience. Furthermore, the people clung to one another: the centered man grasped another person, the person's outstretched arms held a pile of skulls, and the child stood behind the centered man. While the centered man looked up to the sky, the child looked directly at the audience. The centered man's fate had been sealed, while the child looked to the viewers in desperation. Banksy employed historical revision because they offered audiences the opportunity to see the child in the midst of an act of war. While the fate of many had already been determined, the child looked forward, self-aware of the audience's gaze, in hopes of engendering a response that might save others in the future.

The street has long existed as a space for dissent and rebellious communication. Ultimately, Banksy illustrated the power relations between the United States military and its victims during an airstrike. Banksy's combination of spray-painted graffiti and real-world audio accompaniment should be considered nothing short of radical. Banksy elevated the piece through audience interactivity, which subsequently bolstered the

longevity of its message of resistance. Conceptually, the piece was frightening. Its combination of ghoulish illustrations with nonfiction audio provoked a chilling experience. Although widely unpopular, the war in Iraq was considered an even larger failure following the installation of *Crazy Horses*. Since 2013, the American public that considered the U.S. to have achieved its goals in Iraq fell from 46% to only 37% (Drake, 2015). To be sure, Banksy's text existed as a highly critical message against the U.S. military policies in Afghanistan and Iraq. The victims in the text called for an understanding of injustice. By encouraging audience members to identify with the victims rather than the military, Banksy helped viewers understand the unfortunate fate that these victims met. Ultimately, *Crazy Horses* asked audiences to engage with an ideology that is terrified of militarization, shuns the hegemonic strength of the U.S. military, and mourns for the victims of the airstrike.

### *Shoe Shine*

While in New York City, Banksy also capitalized on the ongoing minimum wage strikes against unfair corporate labor. In late August 2013, fast-food workers went on strike and protested outside of restaurants across 60 cities in the largest of an almost yearlong campaign to raise wages (Abrahamian, 2013). Continued labor strikes for a \$15.00 minimum wage illustrate the ongoing social battle between the underpaid and the fast food industry (Pollin and Wicks-Lim). On October 16, 2013, Banksy installed a fiberglass replica of Ronald McDonald at various points throughout the city. In addition to the figure, Banksy's statue was poised at various McDonalds locations "in the New York area together with a – living – boy" that would perform a shoeshine on the corporate clown (Jones, 2013). At each site, a person would install the replica, sit underneath it, and polish the exaggeratedly enlarged, red shoes. When visitors approached the performance artists for a comment, they replied, "No English" (Grant, 2013). The clown statue was very tall, towering over the squatted performers, with a grimacing smirk on its face. Two live performers were used interchangeably at different sites; the shoe-shining performers were, themselves, shoeless. They also wore ragged, torn shirts, dirty pants, and a hat.

Furthermore, the piece was accompanied by an audio file published on the artist's website (Banksy, 2013). The audio file opened with five seconds of calm, carnival music followed by the cheers of children. At the six-second mark, the cheering quieted down and the narrator spoke over the continued carousel music:

"What you see before you is a sculpture entitled, Shoe Shine, dating from the summer of 2013. Depicting the powerful figure of Ronald McDonald waving impassively as his ridiculously oversized clown shoes are buffed to a fine shine. Ronald was adopted as the official mascot of the



McDonalds fast-food corporation chain in 1966. Fiberglass versions of his likeness have been installed outside restaurants ever since. Thus, making Ronald, arguably, the most sculpted figure in history, after Christ (“Oooooooooohhhh!”). For this piece, the artist has reproduced Ronald McDonald in perfect detail, singlehandedly (“Ahhhhh”). If by perfect detail you mean, roughly. And by single handedly you mean, with two people helping (“Awwwww”). The result is a critique of the heavy labor required to sustain the polished image of a megacorporation. Is Ronald’s statuesque pose indicative of how corporations have become the historical figures of our era? Does this hero have feet of clay and a massively large footprint to boot? But, take a closer look, and you may notice something familiar about this clown. His face is that of the Greek god, Hermes – carved by Praxiteles in 340 B.C. Is this a wry, oblique reference to Greek mythology? Or, did the artist have such difficulty trying to sculpt the face, he simply plonked on the most replica bust he could find? We will never know” (Banksy, 2013).

As the carnival music fades away, the narrator whispers one final time, “It’s the second one.” The fiberglass replica, the performing artists, and the audio file all harmonized to create a resonating, rhetorical text of street art. The piece was performed at a multitude of locations including South Bronx (Young, 2013), Boston Road/Seabury, and East Tremont/Arthur Avenue. Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., who visited the installation, stated, “We’re excited to be a part of this. We’re glad that even Banksy can see that our borough is the place to be” (Carlson, 2013). Regardless of political support, however, audiences frequently sought out the piece and it was eventually shut down by the New York Police Department.

Banksy brilliantly employed strategies of incongruity in their deployment of a statue that mimicked Ronald McDonald. The statue portrayed all of the classic Ronald hallmarks – curly red hair, white painted face, yellow jumpsuit with an emblematic “M” on the breast pocket, a dapper white collar, red and white striped sleeves, yellow gloves, and exaggeratedly large clown shoes. Additionally, the performance artist offered mimicry of a McDonald’s employee. As a result, the piece called forth the worldview of

corporate labor. The placement of the installation in direct proximity of a McDonalds restaurant also served as mimicry. Whereas audiences might have expected a statue of the hamburger idol near each restaurant, this installation disrupted onlookers by forcing them to utilize their senses beyond vision. More aggressive than traditional visually reliant street art, the piece forced itself into a public space. A sense of touch was demanded because viewers had to maintain a physical awareness of the piece and surrounding persons. A sense of hearing was demanded because viewers listened to the audio that Banksy included with the text. As a result, the piece received more publicity because discouraged shop owners frequently called the police, which only magnified the visibility of the text. By positioning the installation in proximity to McDonalds restaurants, the piece also mimicked the corporation at large. McDonalds officially sanctioned neither the statue nor the performer. Yet, mimicry readied audiences to consider rhetorical constructions of Banksy's piece as akin to the corporation itself. By using such a ubiquitous symbol, Banksy united their Shoe Shine installation with the company at large. Through the mimicry of the massive fast food icon and an employee, Banksy attempted to persuade audiences to see McDonalds in the same rhetorical frame that they viewed Shoe Shine.

Second, Banksy's piece was rhetorically persuasive because it employed strategic juxtaposition in a variety of ways. While statues had been a recurring theme of Banksy's street art, juxtaposing an inanimate statue with a living person was a first for the anonymous artist. It is often children and their parents that pose for pictures with the countless Ronald McDonald statues at restaurants across the world. Shoe Shine captivated audiences through the strategic juxtaposition of an employee with the ceramic

clown. Perhaps more jarring was the sparkling clean appearance of the statue juxtaposed with the ragged appearance of the performer. Audiences may have been initially drawn to the installation because of a Ronald statue, but the juxtaposition of a shoeless “employee” shining the clown’s shoes showed Banksy’s brilliant ability to represent his point of view. To watch a shoeless man shine clown shoes would pull on the heartstrings of anyone who has worked in the fast food industry. It is also worth noting that the statue donned a frown. Whereas Ronald McDonald is always seen sporting a wide grin, audiences took away a more gloomy perspective because of Banksy’s juxtaposition between a traditionally happy clown with an otherwise depressed look on its face. Banksy was able to call forth a worldview because they mimicked Ronald McDonald, and they were able to persuade audiences against this worldview because they juxtaposed an innocent-seeming symbol with the hidden oppression it represented.

Lastly, Banksy’s use of a performance artist provided a historical revision of the relationship between labor and capital at McDonalds. For the first time in their work, the artist used the performance of a living person to enhance the effect of a text. Not only did the clown appear sparkling clean and the “employee” ragged, but also the ragged and shoeless person was cleaning the shoes of the clown statue. As Kevin DeLuca notes, witnessing bodies that have been victimized by systemic oppression serves to bolster a performance of resistance. Because Banksy used a live performance artist, the piece asked audiences to view illegitimate labor practices first-hand. Such a performance that involved the body can help to “deconstruct and articulate identities, ideologies, consciousness, communities, publics, and cultures in our modern industrial civilization” (DeLuca, 1999). As they witnessed such oppressive forces, audiences were asked to

question their own participation with the system. More importantly, however, the text offered a unique criticism of the corporate giant. Not simply that McDonald's is unhealthy food, but that McDonald's is unhealthy business. "The subject of Banksy's Ronald statue isn't Ronald McDonald. It isn't McDonald's. It's our hatred of McDonald's and their attempts to manage it" (Ozersky, 2013). Lastly, the audio file told listeners that the face of the statue is modeled after Hermes – the Greek god of commerce. This revision prompted a rhetorical suggestion to view McDonalds as mythological in its conquest of American culture. Ultimately, the text offered a historically revised experience as audiences were asked to question their own participation with McDonalds and the oppressive labor practices throughout the fast food industry.

Banksy's traveling installation also questioned how society accepts dissenting bodies in public spaces. The NYPD frequently disrupted Banksy's work. Yet, only the black performance artist was displaced from the public sidewalk. Banksy's white performance artist drew the participation of the Bronx mayor, whereas police officials readily evicted the black performer from the city streets. Banksy's text introduced the power of performance into public space, which provided participating audiences with a new, critical knowledge of class, race, and privilege. Yet, because they successfully displaced the body of Banksy's performance artist, the NYPD produced a deeper knowledge of how to manage those dissenting bodies. This displacement of the black body created two rhetorical implications. First, the counter-narrative to McDonalds became structurally removed from the public space. The police emboldened the polished, hegemonic narrative of McDonalds as they removed the performance from the public's view. Once the piece had been evicted, audiences were no longer asked to question the

validity of the fast food giant's labor practices; a counter-read to the institution of McDonalds became abruptly silenced. Second, the narrative of Shoe Shine was inherently whitewashed. In displacing only the black body, the NYPD unknowingly modified the original message of the text. Banksy's choice to use a black performance artist became erased from the public memory of the piece as the resonating message of an oppressive shoeshine was reduced to only one, white, performance artist. Furthermore, because they shut down this counter-narrative, the police allowed for a propagation of McDonalds' knowledge production, in opposition to Banksy's. If black artists were so easily removed from the public sight, were they just as easily removed from the public mind? Shoe Shine ultimately created the knowledge of corporate labor and racism.

Shoe Shine hijacked an otherwise normal walkway and transformed the area into a performance of resistance. Audiences were forced to accordingly adjust their bodies and accommodate the text's temporal existence. Interactive audiences participated in a street art experience that enhanced their personalized corporeal awareness. Viewers were asked to listen to a tape, while they watched a performance, and they were kept aware of their surroundings. As a result, audiences were left wondering what expense others pay for their privilege to eat fast food. Some of the questions this installation raised were: How does stereotyping fast food workers serve to benefit big-box labor? And why were some bodies forcibly removed from public spaces while others were allowed to remain? Shoe Shine offered a promising reminder of why questions that involve class, race, and privilege should continually be discussed in the public sphere.

### **Conclusion: Disturbing the Piece**

Perhaps one of the most spectacular aspects of Banksy's *Better Out Than In* is that the show itself existed as a comprehensive articulation of the strategies of incongruity. Audiences traversed New York City as if it was a museum, witnessing cultural artifacts that rhetorically constructed Banksy's worldview on a variety of sociopolitical norms. Viewers were conscious of their city and its inhabitants as the streets breathed with living art. Instead of renting an indoor space or a street where all of the installations could be displayed, Banksy's exhibit existed throughout the entire city. As such, Banksy's show offered a disturbance of the piece, or rather, a reconstruction of the ways in which audiences can experience an art gallery. *Better Out Than In* provided mimicry, strategic juxtaposition, and historical reimagining of a traditional art gallery experience in a myriad of ways. First, the show forced audiences to explore areas of New York City that they might not have otherwise. Second, promotion through social media encouraged popular discourse on street art. Digital news services, online forums, and comments on photos across social media platforms exploded with people chatting about where, when, and what the next Banksy installation might possibly entail. Finally, the inclusion of an audio guide throughout *Better Out Than In* was nothing short of revolutionary. Whereas graffiti is traditionally a visually reliant medium, Banksy's audio guide expanded both the content of each piece and the audience's accessibility to experience such novel installations. Not only was this groundbreaking for street art, but also, it provided the infrastructure comparable to an institution. Instead of puttering around a dusty and overpriced museum, these audience members explored the streets of New York City to experience Banksy's street art.

In the final installation of *Better Out Than In*, Banksy paid tribute to New York City's history as a home to street art and graffiti. The artist installed balloons that spelled BANKSY! The narrator of the audio guide explained:

Banksy asserts that outside is where art should live. Amongst us and rather than street art being a fad, maybe it's the last 1,000 years of art history that are the blip – when art came *inside* in service of the church and institutions. But art's rightful place is on the cave walls of our communities where it can act as a public service, provoke debate, voice concerns, forge identities. The world we live in today is run, visually at least, by traffic signs, billboards and planning committees, is that it? Don't we want to live in a world made of art - not just decorated by it?" (Holpuch, 2013)<sup>iii</sup>

Banksy started their career by sneaking into museums and gluing their street art onto the walls. For example, Banksy infiltrated museums in the United States in order to critique the institutions themselves. After successfully installing original works at the Museum of Natural History, Banksy emailed the *New York Times*. "I've wandered around a lot of art galleries thinking 'I could have done that,' so it seemed only right that I would try. These galleries are just trophy cabinets for a handful of millionaires. The public never has any real say in what art they see" (Ellsworth-Jones, 2012). As a result, Banksy quickly learned that they must utilize new techniques in order to create new knowledge. "For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde, 1979). Instead of using pop ups or established galleries, Banksy applied the strategies of incongruity, wholesale, and reimagined what accessible art looks like "on the cave walls of our communities" (Banksy, 2013). Ultimately, these techniques bolstered accessibility and the implications should not be understated, as audience accessibility was spectacular. For example, visually impaired audience members still received Banksy's art through the provided audio guide. Audiences with mobility impairments could still experience *Better Out*

*Than In* through Banksy's uniquely accommodating online coverage. Whereas traditional art is expensive and requires extensive training, Banksy blurred the lines between "high" and "low" conceptions of art by bringing it to the streets.

To be clear, this was not the first time Banksy has offered an exterior exhibition and it will not be the last. Prior to New York City residency, Banksy had employed revolutionary techniques in both Gaza and New Orleans. As of this writing, the artist has infiltrated Syria. Banksy continues to recreate the very concept of an art exhibition and in doing so, bolsters audience accessibility and participation. Unlike the galleries in the Middle East, however, Banksy's New York show was incredibly accessible. Audiences simply had to check social media for the most recent installation and hop a train to see it first hand. It is important to note the immense privileges to travel to these locations to create street art. Audiences needed to have able bodies and able wallets. Nonetheless, Banksy wielded this privilege consciously and employed street art as a bullhorn for localized, sociopolitical injustice. Further, with the employment of social media, Banksy bolstered audience accessibility beyond corporeal and fiscal limitations.

Banksy uses humor to demystify the hegemony of institutions that capitalize on sociopolitical injustice. The artist takes two distinct concepts and sandwiches them together in order to create a third meaning altogether. Banksy does not tell audiences how to fix the world, but rather they use art to show what things might need fixing. In a world that is obsessed with keeping people docile, Banksy works to agitate and arouse our deepest feelings of injustice and the desire to see justice served. The artist's anonymity gives them yet another power because every piece appears locally inspired. As no one knows where Banksy originates, this power of anonymity gives the artist an



ability to create art across the globe while grounding each piece into the culture of the geography in which it exists. We don't know where Banksy is from and as a result, every piece brings the intimate emotion that can only be generated by someone from that community. Because Banksy is not from anywhere, they can speak on behalf of everywhere; because Banksy is not anyone, they can speak on behalf of everyone.

In particular, Banksy's 2013 *Better Out Than In* employed tactics of mimicry, historical revision, and strategic juxtaposition in order to launch criticisms of the social injustices underlying American associations with transnational issues including terrorism, the Iraq War, and corporate wage labor. While middle class families flee into suburbia, committing urban sprawl, artists like Banksy fasten their work to the most accessible location – the streets of the inner city. Urban scrawl is revolutionizing identity discourse in the most densely populated areas on the planet. This thesis analyzed street art by Banksy in order to better delineate the artist's ideology and the ways in which Banksy's art offers liberatory solutions to sociopolitical injustices. Through a variety of media forms including digital video, graffiti, inflatable balloons, and human performance, the artist infiltrated New York City and offered novel, rhetorical perspectives on a multiplicity of tough topics. Communication scholars should continue to critically examine Banksy, other public artists, and the prolific merging of rhetoric and street art.

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## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Banksy is an anonymous personae, we do not know the true owner of the alias. In an effort to respect the anonymity of the artist, I will maintain gender-neutral pronouns such as “they,” “them,” and “their,” throughout this thesis. Although Banksy has conducted in-person interviews with news outlets and on the documentary *Exit Through the Gift Shop*, many contend that these appearances are simply a guise and only embolden the mysterious nature of the artist’s true identity. Some have hypothesized that Banksy is, in fact, a woman. Others have speculated that Banksy is a group of people and that it would be impossible for one person to execute the vast projects that Banksy creates. My use of the term “they” is, therefore, not only gender-neutral but also maintains the credibility of this multi-person hypothesis. There are citations and quotations in this work that refer to the artist as a “he.” In respect to those authors, I will not use the academic [sic], but rather, leave the quotations in their original intent. I have taken great care in combing this document to create as much ease for my reader as possible. I am proud to produce a work that refers to the subject in a gender-neutral pronoun, as Banksy’s anonymous identity should be respected with gender anonymity as well.

<sup>ii</sup> Although many authors conclude that satire *does* have substantial liberatory potential, some also highlight the potential for political comedy to also reinforce the very ideologies that it seeks to disrupt. For further readings on these risks see Stewart, 2013.

<sup>iii</sup> This text is audio that I have transcribed. In my research, I have found many credible news outlets and services that continue to host footage of *Better Out Than In*. In particular, I initially found the text via Holpuch but then transcribed the narration myself from StreetArtNews.